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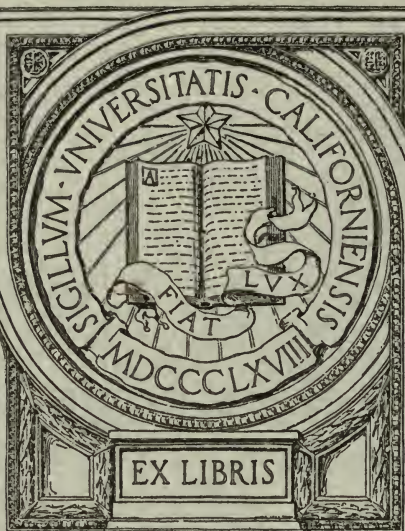
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The Library Assistants' Association Series.

No. 5.

IDEALS: OLD AND NEW.

AN ADDRESS

TO

YOUNG LIBRARIANS.

BY

E. Wyndham Hulme, B.A.,

Librarian of the Patent Office.

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ADDRESS

Ideals: Old and New.

By E. WYNDHAM HULME, B.A., Librarian of the Patent Office.

When I was invited by your Honorary Secretary to open this Session of your Association it was gently intimated to me that undue technicality was to be avoided, and that some spacious theme such as "The Whole Duty of Man," was the kind best suited to my style of eloquence and your powers of assimilation. Now it is my candid opinion that this note of friendly caution originated with our Chairman, who in the past has suffered a good deal from unexpected doses of my philosophy. You all remember Crockett's account of the Scotch Minister's first sermon, how this divine "was ayont the cluds afore we could get oor books shut—o'ot o' sicht gin we gat oorsels settled in oor seats—and we saw nae mair o' him till he said Amen!" Evidently Mr. Thorne was warned by some one to take precautions against a similar catastrophe on this occasion. And this is how it is that you and I are saddled with this ancient theme of "Ideals, Old and New, in Library Administration." You will notice that my subject divides itself like our Hymn Book into two parts—Ancient and Modern. In the first I have to play the uncongenial role of the heavy father and to offer you advice and counsel oft tendered by wiser and more experienced men than myself. If you demur at following me along this well beaten track compose yourselves for a short nap and wake up refreshed in time for part two, which will demand your serious attention. To those who elect to keep awake I would say that Times change and our creeds and ideals are ever changing with them. Hence the repetition of old truths is not altogether unprofitable provided the utterance is sincere and there is not too much of it.

Now I shall begin by asserting my belief that the primary duty incumbent upon all members of a Staff from the Librarian-in-chief to the humblest assistant is that of Curator or Custodian. This remark applies with greater force to the Staffs

*Inaugural Address to the Library Assistants' Association at the Rooms of the Royal Society of Medicine, Wimpole Street, W., October, 1913.

of our larger and more valuable Reference Collections, whose stocks are administered for all time and not for this age alone, but it is of universal application and a perpetual obligation. Other duties you may properly delegate to subordinates as you rise in life, but this duty of vigilance is a responsibility which must accompany you to the bitter day when you say farewell to your colleagues and to your thousand and one dumb friends clad in leather upon the shelves. The present generation is entitled to the fair wear and tear clause in its favour *but to no more*. The custodians must see to it that liberty does not degenerate into licence and that the republic of letters sustains no undue loss at their hands.

Now our principal weapon of defence against the evil doer is the periodical stocktaking by means of the shelf or class list, and upon this weapon I want to say a few words. In a memorable sentence the late Mr. Bradley declared the shelf list to be the true Catalogue of the Library, and experience has confirmed the truth of this statement. To Bradley the shelf list was valuable as an inventory and directory of the collection—as a continuous shorthand note of the books and their relative places on the shelves. But in our days the shelf list has been replaced by the class list, and the class list has assumed a new importance. It is all that it was to Bradley and something more, for it may now be regarded as the real class catalogue of the library. It possesses a merit which the index catalogues do not possess—the merit of simplicity of registration. Works are units—concrete and generally indivisible things; they are called for, delivered to the public and replaced on the shelves as units. Hence if you wish to master the contents of your library, use your stock book or class list as a guide to the shelves and get to know your books thoroughly, first by their exteriors and then by their contents; master their order so that you can at once detect a missing friend. The day will come when your instinct will be so trained that you can find the book you want on the shelves in the dark. If you are discontented with your slow progress, console yourself with the thought that you are working on scientific and the most economical lines. I could dilate still further on the philosophical basis of the stock book and show you that the simplicity of registration which characterises it furnishes one of the two essential tests of the validity or invalidity of all systems of exact book classification. I could, I think, furnish proof that the acceptance of the two tests combined must lead to the ultimate uniformity of all systems of book classification. But I feel that the eye of the Chairman is on me, and I will come back to more solid ground, by urging you to keep your stock book in good order and the books on the shelves

in the order of your stock book. In this way you will become conversant with the contents of books, their method of use, and your memory will be stored with facts not disclosed in your index catalogues. The public will consult you in preference to the catalogues, while you will be the first to detect anything amiss in the use of the library by the public.

But to be true guardians of a collection, more than this is required of you. To safeguard your collection you must be familiar with book values—the rise and fall of prices—and you must proportion your vigilance to the rarity and values of books in the Reference collection. If you are indifferent or ignorant to these things be sure that some member of the public is not. It is dangerous to become over-absorbed in routine work. The worst epidemic of theft in the Patent Office Library took place in full view of the staff when working at high pressure on the printing of our Author and Title Catalogue. In those days bags and all sorts of receptacles were admitted to the library. The raid was an organised and successful one—though we eventually succeeded in recovering the bulk of the books. The detectives employed were not of much assistance, for they only managed to spot a librarian taking out a work to aid digestion at his mid-day meal. But later on, by the help of a reader, we were more successful, and we sent back an undesirable alien to his fatherland, after entertaining him for a few months at the Government's expense. And this brings me to my last point in this connection. In times of stress you may look with confidence to the public for help provided you have always cultivated friendly relations with them. I believe in taking the public into your confidence and making them feel that they are co-partners with you in the general administration of the library. In matters of heating, lighting or ventilation, and all that pertains to their comfort, their criticism has been of material value, while intercourse with them is one great source of a librarian's education. Therefore, train yourselves to take an interest in your readers' work. It requires no doubt some exercise of tact and patience to worm oneself into a reader's confidence. The rendering of small services often presents the desired opening. A talk on indifferent matters gives you the requisite opportunity. Even if your proffered help on the first occasion is of no particular value, the fact that you have shown an interest in a reader's hobby ensures his consulting you of his own accord on all future occasions.

You will perceive that under the cover of talking to you about your duties of custodians, I am at the same time insinuating my ideas as to the qualifications which go to the making of a real librarian.

First and foremost among these I put the love of books,

which is inborn, and which can be educated, but cannot be grafted upon a nature wanting this instinct. Don't confuse the lover of books with the book student. The two qualities are quite distinct, though they are generally combined in the individual in varying proportions. The true book-lover is known by his veneration for the book as the finished product of the human mind. He cherishes it for its history, its condition, its rarity, as well as for its intrinsic interest. Put a paper knife and the uncut volume into his hands, and you will soon see to which of the two classes he belongs. Or place him in charge of your Binding Department and note how sedulously he instructs the binders in the essentials; the proper ordering of the different sections, defends the margins from the knife, maintains the uniformity and dignity of the serials, and in rebinding, transfers in pencil from the cover, notes as to ownership and other details which would otherwise be lost. And next to the love of books I put a certain element of altruism to which I have already alluded. Your book student is often a learned and well-read man, but not infrequently he is a sluggard at imparting information, and his relations with the public are often correct rather than cordial. The book-lover, on the other hand, soon learns to pierce through the formal enquiry at the Central Desk, and to anticipate the real wants of the reader. He is not content always to direct the reader to the shelf, but accompanies him there, finds the books for him and starts him on his road rejoicing. The only fault I have to find with the real book lover is that he is—and I fear ever will be—content with such inadequate remuneration. So long as wages depend upon the laws of supply and demand, *i.e.*, are not regulated by convention or by the State, the rate of remuneration depends upon the relation between these two factors. Thus you can raise wages by restricting the supply of effective candidates—let us say by raising the standard of their efficiency, and you can obtain the same result, temporarily at least, by extending the demand for trained candidates. In part two I shall attempt to forecast the future of the profession in these two respects. Here I will only say that all indications point to a demand for higher qualifications, in the future, and to a gradual unifications of the library service throughout the kingdom.

Into the question of the technical education of the librarian I do not propose to enter here, but I would point out one element in your general education, which determines your status in the eyes of the public more nearly than you might at first suppose. I refer to your command over your native tongue. In classical and mediæval times all youths of a certain standing were taught Rhetoric—which ranked as one of the Liberal Arts. Rhetoric

is defined as the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others. Now I am far from seeking to saddle your syllabus with a training in Rhetoric—but I do think that every librarian should discipline himself in the art of speaking and writing good English. Some of the best educated men I know are wholly incapable of expressing their ideas in public in intelligible language. Their nervous disposition stops the free flow of words, sometimes stops the flow altogether—which is not altogether to be regretted—but when the confined forces from within do procure some utterance, the result is humiliating to the orator and exasperating in its effects upon the audience. As the author of the *Bab Ballads* puts it to the hero of the *Bagpipes*

“ If you really must play on that cursed affair,
For goodness play something resembling an air.”

Now as a fellow sufferer from a common complaint, I propose to offer you a few suggestions based on personal experience. Speaking and writing may be regarded as one and the same Art. No doubt differences develop as you advance in either branch, but they spring at any rate from a common basis. In both cases you must keep your audience in view; your object being to instruct and, if possible, to convince them. For speaking in public begin by writing out your speech in full—reduce it to a few headings and cancel your copy—and then, when your wife is asleep and all the house is still, practise your delivery. The process of writing down what you believe to be in your mind is a training in concentration, or what we call collecting our thoughts, and gives you ample time to select your vocabulary. At a very early stage I want you to become very fastidious and word-curious in this respect. Read Bradley’s “*The Making of English*,” and works of that class, and you will find that you have two sources to draw from—the short and pithy Anglo-Saxon phrase and the longer and more resonant imported one. Don’t confine yourself to either, but select with critical care the word or phrase which expresses your meaning most exactly. In literary composition some people advise you to model your style upon some favourite prose writer. My advice is to do nothing of the sort. Study the best writers as closely as you will, but don’t stoop to copy any one consciously. The right style will come when you are well versed in your subject matter and your vocabulary has been enlarged sufficiently. Once more don’t forget the intimate relation between speaking and writing. The reading aloud of your written composition will correct many defects which are apt to creep in. It will break up the long sentence and substitute a simpler and more direct mode of expression, and you will train your ear to recognise the balance

of sentences. Over condensation of matter is the natural result of deep study. The further you go the more apt you are to assume that your reader can bridge the gaps in your condensed style. But stand up and read your composition in a familiar and conversational frame of mind, and you will soon see the necessity of being a little more explicit, if you wish to be generally intelligible. Finally, don't coin words unnecessarily and avoid all stock phrases and journalese. If you wish to carry weight with those in authority your language must be simple and dignified, and your meaning clear and intelligible. To obtain that mastery over your native idiom will require years of constant practice, study and self-criticism, but your labours will be amply repaid by a growth of confidence in yourself and the increased esteem of all with whom you are associated.

And here my sermon ends, greatly to the relief of one party at any rate.

I now proceed to the second part of my discourse, which will deal with some new ideals of library policy. We will begin by contrasting the organisation of the two great sections of the library system—the municipal and non-municipal libraries, and note the influence of organisation or its absence upon their respective positions.

Municipal library organisation can be dismissed in a few words, as it is so familiar to you. The municipal section has no doubt been greatly favoured by fortune of recent years, which have been a period of triumphant and continuous progress for them. But a good deal of the success is, I think, due to the freemasonry which has consistently characterised them. Their strength and solidarity is the result of a free interchange of opinion and services, and the close touch kept in their ranks. This wholesome *esprit de corps* has inspired many with courage which they would otherwise have lacked, while it has restrained others from premature or ill-advised action.

But if you turn to the other section, you will see that its composition is not equally homogeneous. The non-municipal libraries are not a true class—but a series of sub-classes, comprising State, Copyright, Endowed and Professional Libraries. A common bond between them, however, is to be found in their educational character. They are mostly collections for the promotion of the higher education or research. As a natural result they possess no common organisation, except in so far as they are members of the Library Association. But on this body they are imperfectly represented through no fault of the Council of the Library Association. Many of them from the outset abstained from joining the Association, and other libraries, once represented on this body, have since withdrawn their support.

Now a recent medical writer on mental pathology has pointed out that it is of great physiological importance to the individual to keep himself in touch with the general average of other minds and the current professional opinion of the day. What is true of the individual is also true of bodies of men who isolate themselves, or fail to keep touch with the current trench of professional opinion. An attitude of diffidence and of reserve is engendered which in practice proves a great stumbling block in the path of progress. Hence I think it will be news and good news to you to know that steps are being taken to remove this obstacle by the formation of a Society of Non-municipal librarians, who for the first time will possess a separate organisation for the study and discussion of problems peculiar to themselves. As the constitution of this body is still *sub judice*, I can say no more on the matter. But it is the pious wish of its founders that the new society will work in close union with the old Association, of which they will remain members, and to which they hope to enlist further support. There will be no attempt to trespass upon the ground already occupied by the older body. It will merely reserve to itself that independence of control and privacy of debate which is essential to the proper discussion of certain professional matters. If the hopes of its promoters are realised, the creation of the new body will be a step towards the consolidation of the profession—for this body will be able to formulate the views of librarians who hitherto have been content to remain wholly without influence upon the general trend of library policy. It will be a step toward the co-ordination of library work throughout the kingdom—toward the unification and standardisation of the conditions of the library service in all libraries—so far as the varying requirements of the different classes of libraries admit of such process. Now this is a matter of real importance to your Association, for it directly affects one of the factors, which as I told you a few minutes ago, regulates the rate of remuneration in a profession. The standardisation of the conditions of entry into the non-municipal libraries would increase the demand for candidates capable of passing the new standard; for the introduction of unqualified assistants would be discontinued and the new vacancies would be thrown open to competition. Let us hope that the formation of the new society will be a first step in that direction.

That there is room for further co-ordination of library work in the profession I am a firm believer. Take for instance the requirements of the research student which admittedly are of high national importance. Historical research is so exacting and varied in its requirements, that its satisfaction must to a great extent, be outside the range of the Municipal Library; even of your largest Reference Collections.

But the Municipal Library is undoubtedly most convenient of access to the Student; and I believe that under proper regulations, the wealth of books in some of our State and other collections might be made accessible to readers in our rate-supported libraries. The German University Libraries are very liberal in this respect. Some of the Scotch University libraries and the National Library of Wales are, I believe, already granting such facilities, and I really don't see why some of our State Libraries at least, should not follow suit. Of course, where a library is inhibited by its charter or regulations from lending books outside its own precincts, it would be foolish to make application at present in that particular quarter, but many libraries possess a free hand in the matter. I admit there are plenty of difficulties in the way of getting the practice established. Students at first would be shy of making application. The bibliographical resources of the ordinary municipal library are at present inadequate, and would have to be strengthened to enable the librarian to make his request in the proper quarter, while many librarians, who would grant an isolated request when made by a responsible authority, would yet be willing to establish a general precedent in favour of such practice. Fortunately in this matter Photography has come to our assistance. We are now able to produce by the turn of a handle permanent bromide prints in facsimile at the cost of a few pence, so that in the near future our larger libraries will be able to send copies of printed or MS matter to applicants without parting with their treasures. Mr. Guppy tells me that the rotary bromide process has been in use at the Rylands library for over ten years, and that many a scholar has reason to be thankful for this advance in science—and let me add for the generous spirit which characterizes the administration of this unique collection. I have said sufficient I think to shew that with goodwill existing between the two sections of the library profession, municipal libraries may look with great hope to an extension of facilities of access on behalf of the readers to a literature which to a great extent lies without their province to collect.

But there is another aspect to this question. If this principle of library interchange were accepted and introduced into practice we could make out a strong case for the establishment of a State Loan Collection which would act as a bibliographical centre and as an intermediary between the two parties. This would, of course, greatly simplify the process of exchange. But I propose to attempt to justify it as a state economy.

Now the non-municipal libraries are characterized by the rapid growth of their collections to a far greater extent than the rate-supported libraries, for in the latter the weeding out of worn

copies tends to retard the growth. In the State Libraries the wear and tear is infinitely less. Moreover the State and Professional Libraries specialize in serial literature. This class of literature is extending year by year and is both costly to buy and very bulky to preserve. For research purposes it can never be superseded, and therefore it cannot be discarded, even though the earlier portions of these serials gradually recede into a limbo of purely historical interest. Hence every Department collects and preserves a vast quantity of serial literature, the demand for the earlier portion of which, decreases steadily. Take this fact in connection with the general rebuilding of the State and Professional Libraries in London which has taken place during the last ten or twenty years. Obviously an economy could be effected by the establishment of a State Repository for the storage of serials or portions of serials not in active demand in the Departmental libraries. A limit to the growth of these Libraries by the automatic removal of partly superseded matter means the maintenance, in the future, of their present efficiency, besides a great economy in their future building and shelving expenditure. The State would thus to a great extent recoup itself for its expenditure on the Central Library by the economies it would effect in other directions. I know that I shall at once be met by the objection that conditional access and actual access are two different things and that the reader can't wait for the book he wants. That may be true of the general reader of light literature, to whom it is immaterial what he reads, provided he is offered some work to his liking. But is is the reverse of true of the research student, who will travel from South to North to verify a statement, and for whom the examination of a reference may mean the completion of the work, perhaps, of a lifetime.

So much for the State's interests in the matter—but how about yourselves? Obviously if the municipal librarian can gain conditional access to works beyond his proper power of purchase his status will materially appreciate. Bibliographies, which at present you don't buy, because they lead to no tangible result, will become essential every-day tools, and the rate of remuneration of the municipal librarian will approach more nearly that of the other section; for you will require men of equal education to administer either section efficiently. Moreover, the experience in bibliography which you have gained in the Reference Collections of Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, or Cardiff will serve you in good stead when you take charge of smaller libraries elsewhere. At present, I believe, promotion is often accompanied by a decrease in this efficiency, for disuse of a function is always accompanied by the atrophy of the corresponding organ. Here at any rate the unification and co-ordination of

the library system must ultimately be to your benefit. The higher standard of efficiency required must react favourably upon the general rate of remuneration.

Finally, your interests are involved in another branch of library extension. I mean the extension of a library service in the rural districts. I think you may take it as proved that the product of the 1d. rate will not provide an efficient service in these districts, while it is almost certain that the rural authorities will seldom, if ever, be willing to vote a higher rate. There are no spendthrifts in the countryside. Rigid economy is part and parcel of their traditions. On the other hand it is clear that a demand for such service already exists, and that this demand will steadily increase as the new class of small holders and labourers from the town dispossesses the old and illiterate farming class. Moreover, it is generally admitted that the influx from the countryside into the town is not solely due to economic causes. It is due in part at least to those intellectual attractions which the town can and does provide, but which are absent in the rural districts. Now at present, the jurisdiction of your municipal libraries ends at the city gates; but with the help of your imagination you can get over the wall. The rural library service, to be efficient, must be subsidized from some quarter. Who will step into the breach and work out the suitable organisation? The County authorities are unsympathetic and wholly inexperienced in library administration. Cannot Dives of the town spare a few crumbs for Lazarus outside the city? I would seriously suggest this matter for the consideration of your Council. Why not work out the problem for a county or part of a county—a Home County for preference—with a centre such as Croydon as the starting point? Could not Mr. Berwick Sayers come down from the heights of Parnassus and devote a few hours of his leisure to the subject? I am sure that he is fully equipped for the task, which, apart from the £ s. d., is not a difficult one. In it, the administration must be of the simplest character. The Government share might be to bear all cost of transportation.

In conclusion, let me remind you that the old alchemists, in searching for the secret of the philosopher's stone for transmuting metals into gold, actually discovered many a remedy for the ills to which our frail body is subject; and it is possible that you, in investigating unselfishly the means of improving the lot of your poorer neighbours, may find that the obstacles which have stood in the way of passing the Association's Bill for so many weary sessions have unexpectedly been removed, and that your municipal authorities will at last stand free from their existing

statutory limitations. But be that as it may, be assured that the interests of your Association are intimately bound up with all questions that tend to the unification of the library service, to increased co-operation between its various sections, and to the extension of equal facilities for reading, whether for recreation or research, in all parts of the United Kingdom.

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